
Standards for Library Service in Institutions:

A. In the Correctional Setting

ANDREE BAILEY

THE FIRST official standards for library service in adult correctional institutions were approved by the executive committee of the American Prison Association on May 14, 1943 and by the executive board of the American Library Association in January 1944. Titled "Objectives and Standards for Libraries in Adult Prisons and Reformatories," they were published as a supplement to the July-August 1943 issue of *The Prison World*. In 1946 they became Chapter 10 of the American Prison Association's *Manual of Suggested Standards for a State Correctional System*.¹ Thus began the history of standards for prison libraries.

Prior to the 1943 standards there were few materials specifically prepared to guide correctional institutions in the establishment and operation of libraries. In 1916 Carrie Emma Scott, assisted by the ALA Committee on Library Work in Hospitals and in Charitable and Correctional Institutions, compiled the *Manual for Institution Libraries*.² Austin MacCormick's *The Education of Adult Prisoners*, published in 1931 and considered a landmark work in this field, contained an extensive and helpful chapter and two appendices on libraries in penal institutions.³ The ALA published *The Prison Library Handbook* in 1932 as a guide for persons untrained in organizing institution libraries. It adapted established professional standards for routine work to the institutional setting.⁴

The *Library Manual for Correctional Institutions*, prepared by the Committee on Institution Libraries of the American Prison Association, was published in 1950. Its organization was similar to the 1932 *Handbook* but included the "Objectives and Standards for Libraries in Adult Prisons and Reformatories."⁵

Andree Bailey is Institution Library Consultant, Division of State Library Services, Florida.

These first standards were security-minded, contained information for handling routine library procedures, listed selection aids and materials for the reference collection, and suggested strong cooperation with the education department. The importance of a trained librarian, a regular library budget, a well-selected materials collection, and suitable library quarters was stressed.

Revised editions of these standards appeared in the 1954 and 1959 editions of the *Manual of Correctional Standards*. In 1962 the Committee on Institution Libraries of the American Correctional Association prepared new standards which were approved by the ALA and ACA. These standards, more compactly written and in a different format, constituted a major revision of the earlier ones. They stressed services, called for a book collection of no less than 6,000 well-selected volumes with at least ten books per inmate, and specified the particulars for a staff library. The number of recommended library staff was increased to accommodate larger institutions. An institution with a population up to 1,000 inmates would require one professional librarian; an institution with a population over 3,500 inmates would need one professional librarian, one professional assistant librarian, one correctional officer and one library technician or senior clerk.

The 1962 standards were reviewed and minor revisions made by both the ACA and ALA before they were included in the 1966 *Manual of Correctional Standards*. They have provided the direction for correctional libraries. When followed, this direction has provided quality library service in an institution on par with quality service in a public library.

A new edition of the *Manual of Correctional Standards* is in preparation. The format of the new standards will be different from previous ones. Basically, it will include a general historical discussion of the subject, a clear-cut and concise statement of objectives, specific standards which relate to the statement of objectives, and rationale for the standards statement. These standards will be written on a functional rather than an organizational level, and they will show a continuum of services rather than segmented ones.

The ACA and the ALA have had consistent involvement in the efforts to improve library service in correctional institutions. In 1938 the ACA established the standing Committee on Institution Libraries.⁶ The ALA was actively involved in the prison library field as early as 1911 when a Committee on Libraries in Federal Prisons reported on its efforts to improve library services in federal penitentiaries.⁷ These two organizations

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have cooperated over the years, but in 1960 this relationship became stronger when the ACA approved a standing committee, the ACA/ALA (Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries) Joint Committee on Institution Libraries.⁸ This committee is composed of members of both organizations and its projects reflect the thinking of both groups.

Correctional library standards have been prepared by the ACA Committee on Institution Libraries and approved by both the ACA and the ALA. They stand as an excellent example of the cooperative spirit in existence between the two groups.

Objectives and standards were first developed nearly twenty-nine years ago; their full implementation has yet to be achieved. In 1966 a survey of the services, facilities, and resources in federal and state-supported correctional institutions was conducted by AHIL. Of the 294 institutions queried, 150 reported that many of the libraries were poorly housed, inadequately staffed, and inadequately funded. There were very few professional librarians in institutions.⁹ Only \$323,941 was reported spent for salaries, when minimum standards called for \$3,762,000. The total amount spent for library materials was \$214,130; standards required \$1,577,713. The total operating expenditure reported was only \$531,610 when it should have been \$4,591,840. The number of volumes needed to bring the libraries to the minimum standard of ten books per inmate was 1,031,720.¹⁰ Of the 1,298,271 volumes reported, it was estimated that from 50 to 90 percent were substandard or obsolete.

There has been no official survey conducted since 1966, but there has been increased library activity in the institutions. A major reason for this has been Title IV of the Library Services and Construction Act. This legislation, passed in 1966, provided federal money for institutional libraries in each state on a matching basis. This act was amended in 1971 and placed library services for institutions under Title I with services for public libraries. Title IV provided limited funds; under Title I a state is not restricted to a specific amount for institution libraries. Exemplifying the effect LSCA can have on state correction libraries is Louisiana where library service in three adult correctional institutions was inaugurated within two and one-half years of the passage of Title IV.¹¹ Under LSCA most state libraries have also established a position for an institution library consultant. These consultants have cooperated with correctional institutions in planning, organizing and implementing library services within the institutions.

Several state departments of correction have added a coordinator of

library services to their staffs. This position assures the improvement of the library in the institution by placing the responsibility for the library on a particular person, rather than making it a secondary concern of the chaplain, a teacher, or a recreation director.

Even with the improvements made since the advent of LSCA, Title IV, responses to a recent inquiry mailed to the institution consultants of the state libraries revealed that in many states a wide gap still exists between actual library practice and standards. Few states felt that they met the standards, however, many reported improved collections and progress in providing qualified librarians. One reply summarized the general situation: "good things are happening in . . . correctional libraries but not as rapidly as we might wish."¹²

Trends in the field of corrections promise to affect library services and library standards. More emphasis is being placed on community involvement today; there are work release programs which allow an inmate to work in the community while fulfilling his sentence. Education release programs permit an inmate to attend an outside educational institution to obtain courses and degrees not offered within the correctional institutions. Consideration is being given to community-based alternatives to incarceration; alternatives which may permit such people as narcotics offenders, one-time offenders, and minor offenders to be released into community treatment centers under the supervision of parole and probation personnel.¹³

Since there is a movement away from the large isolated institution to smaller facilities located in populated areas, it is logical to assume that the public library will be called upon to participate more actively in the service provided to correction institutions. Correctional libraries will become more involved in library networks, utilizing the collections of other institutions as well as public and state libraries.

Libraries standards for the 1970s must reflect not only the changes in correctional thinking but must also incorporate new library techniques. They must be adaptable to the small short-term institution as well as the large institution. They must enlarge the scope of the correctional library to that of a learning center with all types of materials and equipment for learning and recreation. Previous standards have emphasized printed material; they now need to give particular prominence to all types of audiovisual materials.

The United States Supreme Court has recently defined a prisoner's right of access to legal research materials as an extension of his right of access to the courts,¹⁴ and library standards should contain guidelines

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for providing access to these materials. Emphasis needs to be placed upon the correctional library's participation in cooperative library networks as a means of expanding its collection and services. And special attention must be given to the preparation of standards for juvenile correctional institutions. One document which has been specifically directed to these institutions, *Institutions Serving Delinquent Children, Guides and Goals*, includes a section on library services.¹⁵ The writing of the juvenile standards is a current project of the ACA/ALA (AHIL) Joint Committee on Institution Libraries.

The ACA has acknowledged the need for an organized program of voluntary accreditation. The *Manual of Correctional Standards* will serve as a foundation on which to build this program. The implications of such a program on the library standards are that it will focus attention upon meeting them and will call for a commitment to strive continuously to improve the services and programs of the library.¹⁶ Implementation of the accreditation program will result in a new chapter in the history of prison library standards—a chapter which will show a more concerted effort to apply the standards and an improved status for correctional libraries.

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